

Measles

Disease Fact Sheet Series

What is measles?

Measles is a disease caused by measles virus and is sometimes referred to as "hard", "red" or "10 day measles".

Who can get measles?

Measles virus can infect any person of any age who has not previously had the disease or measles vaccine.

How is measles spread?

Airborne droplets, as the result of coughing or sneezing, spread the virus. It spreads easily and rapidly.

How soon do symptoms appear after exposure?

It takes from 8-12 days for the cold-like symptoms to appear and 14 days for the rash.

What are the signs and symptoms of measles?

The disease begins with cold like signs and symptoms including a cough, runny nose, high temperature and red watery eyes. By the second day after onset, a red blotchy rash appears at the hairline and spreads down the body to the arms and legs. The rash disappears in the same order of appearance (head to foot) in about 5-6 days.

How can parents be sure that their child's illness is measles?

The only sure way to determine if an illness is indeed measles is through a blood test.

When and for how long is a person able to spread measles?

Measles can be spread from one day before the onset of cold-like symptoms through the fourth day of the rash.

What are the complications associated with measles?

Among children with measles, about 10% develop ear infections, about 5% develop pneumonia, about 0.1% (1 per 1000 cases) develop encephalitis (inflammation of the brain that can result in deafness or mental retardation), and about 0.1% to 0.2% (1 to 2 per 1000 cases) die from it.

(Over)

Is there a treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles.

Can measles be prevented?

Yes. Measles vaccine (usually given in combination with rubella and mumps vaccine and called measles-mumps-rubella or MMR vaccine) is recommended for all children at 12-15 months of age and again at 4-6 years of age. The two doses of vaccine normally provide life long immunity.

Does a past infection with measles make a person immune for life?

Yes